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SUBJECT: SUDAN - U.N. UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL HOLMES BRIEFS DONOR
COMMUNITY ON RECENT TRIP TO SUDAN

¶1. Summary: On November 29, U.N. Under-Secretary General (U/SYG) for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes briefed the donor community in Khartoum on his recent trip to Sudan, which included visits to all three Darfur states, the Three Areas, and Southern Sudan, as well as meetings with government officials in Khartoum. Holmes expressed concern regarding worsening violence and increasingly constricted access to affected communities in Darfur, noting the fragility of the humanitarian operation. Holmes also noted significant resource gaps for early recovery needs, particularly in the health sector, in Southern Sudan, where the humanitarian emergency has ended but key indicators for child and maternal health remain critical. The U/SYG also observed that lack of reconciliation between communities and reconstruction is preventing many internally displaced persons (IDPs) from returning to the Three Areas.

¶2. U/SYG Holmes's visit came at a time when humanitarian agencies, particularly in South Darfur, have expressed growing concern regarding the sustainability of Darfur aid operation, given bureaucratic obstacles (which are worst in South Darfur state) and increased insecurity. U/SYG requested that the humanitarian community do everything possible to resolve lingering issues before problems escalate, while also stressing to the Government of National Unity (GNU) Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) their responsibility to protect humanitarian aid workers, the importance of consistent application of agreements, and the necessity of continuing humanitarian interventions for IDPs and non-IDPs. End Summary.

DARFUR

¶3. The prevailing themes that emerged from Holmes's visits to the three Darfur states were security, or lack thereof, and shrinking humanitarian space. While humanitarian agencies have been remarkably successful in sustaining the lives of more than 4.7 million Darfuris, insecurity continues to escalate, with attacks on humanitarian workers and limited access hampering relief efforts. Many places in Darfur are only accessible via helicopter, making access difficult and expensive.

¶4. Holmes acknowledged that the problems facing the humanitarian community throughout Darfur are at their worst in South Darfur, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) experience a level of intimidation and Sudanese government harassment not felt in other Darfur regions. Holmes relayed that he had encouraged Sudanese government officials in South Darfur to consider protection and gender-based violence programs as part of a complete humanitarian response to the Darfur crisis and to take counter-measures against

attacks on IDPs, NGOs, and U.N. staff.

¶5. During the U/SYG's visit to Kalma IDP camp, which has been historically the most politically sensitive camp in Darfur and was the site of a Sudanese government massacre in August 2008, IDPs reported no intention of returning to their pre-crisis homes. IDPs expressed concern regarding the ongoing insecurity and requested increased security measures. Holmes reported that U.N.-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) patrols have improved the security situation in Kalma camp now that there is a 24-hour Bangladeshi FPU (Former Police Unit) presence since September. Holmes noted, however, that many other camps in Darfur are in need of increased protection and security measures, particularly in the face of continued gender-based violence. UNAMID currently lacks the capacity to replicate the Kalma patrols in all camps and the HAC remains suspicious of all protection and gender-based violence-related programming (Note: the Kalma FPU is the first of 19 expected FPUs under UNAMID, two others - Indonesia and Nepalese - have now arrived in Darfur but are not fully operational).

¶6. Security is also a significant problem in West Darfur, where the presence of large numbers of Khartoum-supported Chadian armed opposition forces requires UNAMID to escort humanitarian workers to project sites. Holmes reported that IDPs have concerns regarding limited UNAMID presence and continued insecurity, which prevents IDPs from considering returns. Holmes also noted that the prolonged presence of Darfur's IDP camps is causing severe environmental damage, with firewood collection and use, the timber trade, construction, and brick-making (which requires water) straining the already limited natural resources in the area.

THE THREE AREAS AND SOUTHERN SUDAN

¶7. U/SYG Holmes identified returns as the main concern in Agok and Abyei, noting that conditions remain unfavorable for full returns. Holmes met with the new Abyei Administrator and Deputy Administrator, who reported that government resources have not yet materialized for the implementation of the Abyei roadmap. In Abyei, only 1,000 of approximately 50,000 IDPs have returned, and reconstruction has not yet begun. Approximately 30,000 of the IDPs from Abyei remain in Agok. The IDPs continue to be distrustful of living near the Misseriya Arabs and require assurances of security before returning.

¶9. U/SYG Holmes also highlighted the continued early recovery and recovery needs in Southern Sudan, noting that key health and nutrition indicators in Southern Sudan continue to be significantly worse than in Darfur. Holmes urged continued donor support for basic services, construction efforts, and development. Holmes stated that reconstruction in areas outside of Juba remains limited and noted that the Government of Southern Sudan must contribute more to the early recovery and construction effort in areas outside of Juba.

MEETINGS WITH KHARTOUM-LEVEL MINISTERS

¶10. The U/SYG's meetings with HAC Commissioner Hassabo Abdurahman in Khartoum focused primarily on the obstacles to the humanitarian effort in Darfur. Holmes and the HAC Commissioner discussed programming in sensitive areas and harassment of NGOs in South Darfur, as well as the need for increased GNU investment in the aid effort, improved camp coordination, the introduction of multiple entry and exit visas for NGO staff, and government intervention to improve security. The notoriously duplicitous HAC agreed to consider the requests but gave no indication of when or if the U/SYG's suggestions would be implemented.

¶11. Holmes noted that the humanitarian community and the Sudanese government continue to hold diverging positions regarding the issue of returns in Darfur. The Khartoum government insists that large-scale returns have begun in Darfur, while the humanitarian community does not currently report on returns. Holmes recognized increasing evidence that small numbers of IDPs are returning to cultivate and harvest but noted that the population movements are

currently on a very small scale. The HAC believes that humanitarian agencies are exaggerating the total numbers of affected Darfuris, while underestimating the numbers of returnees. During meetings with HAC officials, Holmes agreed to re-examine the numbers of returnees and the total number of affected populations, including IDPs, in Darfur.

¶12. Holmes commended the government for their increased engagement and dialogue with international NGOs on key issues as a result of the Joint Communiqué. However, extensive delays and blockages remain in place on visas, travel permits, the transfer of funds, and equipment. While acknowledging the positive steps that had been taken with the timely renewal of the Moratorium on Restrictions, the earliest ever renewal, Holmes highlighted the importance of the government's compliance with existing agreements in both letter and spirit. Holmes encouraged the GNU to ensure the High Level Committee meets once a month to monitor the implementation, or lack thereof, of the Joint Communiqué and monitor the functioning of the new state level Tri-partite Joint Technical Committee (TJTC). Holmes requested that the humanitarian community address inconsistencies between state and federal-level application of agreements within the TJTC, urging that relief agencies resolve outstanding issues before the problems escalate. Given U.K. and U.S. concerns regarding HAC seizure of government-owned NGO assets, Holmes agreed to raise the issue with the HAC in future meetings.

CONCLUSION

¶13. U/SYG Holmes's third visit to Sudan confirmed the continuing deterioration of access and security in Darfur and ongoing challenges for early recovery in other regions of Sudan. According to Holmes, the key issues remain protection of civilians, particularly women and children; safety and security for aid workers; and respect for the fundamental principles of humanitarianism. Holmes identified an enduring and comprehensive peace settlement in Darfur as the needed solution for the crisis, the absence of which will continue to hamper relief efforts and place conflict-affected Darfuris and humanitarian staff at risk. Embassy Khartoum will continue to monitor government cooperation and advocate on behalf of NGOs in Darfur.

FERNANDEZ